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Definitions, catharsis

Terrorism and arrested minds

To the Editor:

James Joyce, who knew all too well the desperation of Irish nationalists, wrote, "Terror is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the secret cause."

The key word, as Joyce points out through the voice of Stephen Dedalus, is *arrests*. By arresting the mind, the terroristic act is completed because it has set the parameters for action or inaction.

This is precisely the point that is missed by James McCartney in his July 29 Op-ed Page analysis of the Reagan administration's response to the so-called worldwide terroristic threat, "Terrorism policy is all talk." Mr. McCartney stated, "The administration has examined the possibility of di-

rect military action against terrorists in both Lebanon and Central America, and decided against it, at least for the moment, because innocents would be killed."

Has Mr. McCartney forgotten that the Reagan administration unleashed the guns of the USS New Jersey on "innocents" in Lebanon and that a group working for the CIA exploded a car bomb outside a mosque in Lebanon, killing scores of people?

Has Mr. McCartney ever wondered what the tiny nation of El Salvador has been doing with the hundreds of millions of dollars in military aid that it has received from the United States? One of the programs being financed by this aid is the systematic bombing of the Salvadoran countryside.

Continuing to debate the Rea-

gan administration's "war on terrorism" in terms of high profile assaults on terrorists that are staged for the press is naive, or worse, in that it promotes a national catharsis built on the hysteria that is arising over terrorism.

What is ever worse is that this situation allows the Reagan administration a great deal of latitude in constructing its definition of terrorism, which will then be the definition of choice among those who have become exasperated over the media's one-sided presentation of terror.

Mr. McCartney should remember that victims and perpetrators of terror are identified not only through violent, terroristic acts, but also by the extent to which they are willing to contribute to the arresting of the mind.

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